DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 248 524 CS 208 557

AUTHOR Pytlik, Betty P.
TITLE English 308J: Organizational Report and Letter Writing.
PUB DATE Apr 84
NOTE 8p.; Revised version of a paper presented at the National Council of Teachers of English Spring Conference (3rd, Columbus, OH, April 12-14, 1984).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Business Communication; Course Content; Course Descriptions; *Education Work Relationship; Higher Education; *Job Skills; *Letters (Correspondence); Teaching Methods; *Technical Writing; Writing Exercises; *Writing Instruction; Writing Processes
IDENTIFIERS Audience Awareness; *Organizational Reports

ABSTRACT

The organizational report and letter writing course at Ohio University (Athens) is an advanced composition course designed to help students who expect to do such writing in their future jobs, but for whom technical writing and business communication courses are either inappropriate or insufficient. Students work in groups of four, investigating a topic of interest to all the members, using problem solving strategies to analyze writing situations, and writing short informative and analytical reports and letters. The eight writing assignments involve prewriting activities as well as revision. Students write with enthusiasm, and the collaborative nature of the activities reduces their anxiety toward group projects on the job. The assignments also provide students with an opportunity to consider a variety of audiences. (HTH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

Betty P. Pytlik
Ohio University

ED248524

English 308J: Organizational Report and Letter Writing*

In the late 1960's the Ohio University Curriculum Council transferred the responsibility for determining English composition requirements from the English Department to individual departments. But in 1976, the Faculty Senate moved to return that responsibility to the English Department. A compromise between English and other departments was reached: The English Department assumed the responsibility for freshman writing and the departments assumed the responsibility for defining their own advanced composition requirements. The provost encouraged departments to develop their own advanced composition courses and appointed an interdisciplinary committee--the English Composition Advisory Committee--to approve and oversee those courses.

When we four panelists from anthropology, history, education and English proposed this session nearly a year ago, we were meeting regularly as members of that interdisciplinary committee to discuss how to evaluate the sixteen junior-level writing courses now being offered. One consequence of our frequent and intense discussions with instructors of all the courses was a renewed enthusiasm for writing in subject areas. The purpose of this panel is to share that enthusiasm--as well as our reservations--by describing four of the courses that students may take to meet their advanced composition requirement.

---

*This is a revision of one of four papers in a panel discussion, "A Potpourri of Interdisciplinary Approaches to Teaching Writing," presented at the Spring 1984 Conference of The National Council of Teachers of English. In addition to Organizational Report and Letter Writing, advanced composition courses in Writing in Sociology and Anthropology, Historical Research and Writing, and Educational Research Techniques were described.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Betty P. Pytlik
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS 208 557

Although sixteen courses have been approved by the English Composition Advisory Committee since 1976, as one might expect, over sixty percent of the students satisfy their requirement by taking one of the two writing courses offered in the English Department--technical writing and advanced composition. As many as ten advanced composition sections may be offered in a quarter, and each is designed by the instructor, most of whom choose to follow their literature bents.

My version of advanced composition, Organizational Report and Letter Writing, came about because each quarter a dozen or so frustrated juniors and seniors in my technical writing classes complained that they didn't need technical writing skills. While they needed experience in practical writing, technical writing, they said, didn't give them the variety of on-the-job writing tasks they felt they needed. For the administration, these frustrated students created an additional problem: Faced with a choice between advanced composition classes that emphasized academic writing and technical writing classes, they opted to enroll in technical writing, often bumping students for whom the course was a requirement.

A Description of Organizational Report and Letter Writing

These sections of advanced composition are designed to help students who expect to write reports and letters in their future positions. Students for whom technical writing and business communication are not appropriate or sufficient will work in groups of four, assigned according to their interests in such issues as uses of computers in education, reclamation of strip mined land, unemployment in Ohio, the responsibility of industry to its employees, the plight of our public education system. Using investigative techniques, they will become experts on their topics. Using problem-solving strategies to analyze writing situations, students will write short informative and

analytical reports and letters.

Assumptions Underlying the Development of the Course

In developing the writing assignments for two sections of Organizational Report and Letter Writing, I assumed that the students would represent a variety of majors--I found that thirty-three students were from twenty-five majors--and that they would write more enthusiastically and effectively if they wrote about something they were interested in and if the writing assignments were related.

I also assumed that they had had little or no experience in

. thinking of writing as a process,

. writing collaboratively,

. writing to a variety of audiences,

. using prewriting activities,

. using revising strategies,

. using library resources.

Procedures and Assignments

To identify national or local issues that interested them, students spent a class skimming copies of The Christian Science Monitor, Newsweek, US News and World Report, National Geographic, Harper's, Discover, and Psychology Today. Then, I divided the classes into groups of four and asked each group to identify an issue the members could investigate together. They read, discussed their choices, and wrote individual drafts for Writing Assignment #1:

> Subject: Writing Assignment #1, A Memo to Me
>
> By now, your group has selected a topic that you will investigate and write about during the quarter. In a jointly-written memo, no longer than one and one-half pages, please tell me what issue you have selected. Convince me that I should approve your topic selection. Why is the issue you have chosen worth

investigating and writing about? Why do each of you have an interest in the topic? Since you will be creating your own audiences for the pieces of writing based on this topic, who do you think would be interested in the issue?

Frequently, advanced composition students have not had occasion to use library resources; nor have they practiced summarizing printed material. Consequently, after they had toured the library and practiced summarizing, they were required to summarize for their group an article related to the group's issue (Writing Assignment #2).

Writing Assignment #3 required each student to identify an expert associated with the group's issue, someone to whom he or she would write a letter of inquiry. This assignment was most effective in helping the students become aware of their audience's needs. (Unfortunately, because Ohio University is on the quarter system, many students didn't receive responses to their inquiries in time to use the replies in their final papers.)

In Writing Assignment #4 students were asked to define for their classmates a concept related to the issue they were investigating and for which a reader's understanding was essential.

Writing Assignment #5 required each student to investigate the history of the group's issue. As a group, they prepared for their classmates a narrative of the background of the issue.

Writing Assignment #6, printed below, was written to a guest speaker, the coordinator of prison programs for the university, who addressed both classes. (In both classes, a group investigated the insanity plea; in one class, a group investigated the use of drugs in rehabilitating prisoners.)

Subject: Writing Assignment Based on Dr. Susan Steiner's Friday Lecture

Dr. Steiner told you that there are on the Athens campus about a dozen students who are parolees from Ohio correctional facilities and that she is responsible for orienting these students when they arrive on campus. Assume that her office has funds to hire a pair of upperclasspersons to work together in planning and

carrying out the orientation. Her selection for the two positions will be based on a short (one-and-a-half, two page) letter to her in which the pair of applicants describes and justifies the orientation program they propose.

I will evaluate your team-letters on these bases:

CONTENT

How well does your letter reflect your understanding of the parolees' needs --based on Dr. S's talk and what you know from your own experiences?

How realistic is your proposal?

How convincingly have you presented your proposal?

Have you analyzed your reader thoroughly? What does she already know and what do you need to tell her?

Have you organized the information so that she can make her decision speedily?

STYLE

Have you edited the letter so that the style is concise and appropriate to the reader and purpose?

Have you proofread for spelling, punctuation, and grammar?

From your letters, Dr. S. will select the pair that she would hire. Those two students will receive an additional A to be calculated in their final grade.

ADDRESS: Dr. Susan Steiner
Coordinator of Correctional Programs
Tupper Hall

Writing Assignment #7, the major writing task of the quarter, was an urge-to-action letter related to the group's issue. Having identified readers who could act upon their requests, each student prepared a three-page argument in favor of the reader's taking a specified action. One student, for example, urged a local company to tighten its security on computer-stored client information.

Writing Assignment #8, printed below, had at least five features that recommend it for an in-class writing assignment worth adapting for any advanced writing course:

. It allowed students to critique the class while at the same time fulfilling a final writing assignment.

. It incorporated two classroom activities I had used frequently during the quarter, group work and prewriting activities.

. It resulted in eight memoranda from sixteen students rather than sixteen memoranda.

. It gave students a chance to write to a reader whose expectations and needs they had come to know well.

. It asked them to gather information, analyze their reader's needs, and select the details, organization, and style appropriate to the reader.

Subject: Fall Quarter Final 308 Group Memo

The purpose of your final in-class group memo will be to recommend to me how this course in practical writing should be taught in the future. As we have discussed, I designed my two sections of 308 this quarter to be an experiment to see if a writing-in-the-real-world course would appeal to juniors and seniors. I would appreciate your telling me which assignments and teaching techniques to keep, to eliminate, to add, and to modify--and why they should be kept, eliminated, added, modified.

Procedure: Take 10 minutes to brainstorm as a class. I will take notes on the board for you.

Take 20 minutes to brainstorm in groups of 4.

Take 15 minutes to jot down some notes in pairs.

On Tuesday, meet in pairs and discuss your ideas.

Compose one memo to me from the two of you.

Criteria for Evaluation: As usual, I will evaluate your group memo on the basis of:

A sense of your reader's need for information

A sense of your reader's need for organization

Style appropriate to your reader

Editing skills

In Conclusion

For me, one of the most satisfying aspects of this course was the enthusiasm the students had for their topics. They were eager to share their ideas, to

ask for help from their classmates and me, and to hear from their readers. I believe it was that enthusiasm that made the students receptive to the pre-writing and revising activities introduced during the quarter.

More important, however, was what the students reported: For one thing, while their previous experiences in working on group projects had frequently been unpleasant--one person did little, another dominated, etc.--their success in the advanced composition groups had made them less apprehensive about group projects on the job. They also reminded me that in their other academic writing they had few chances to consider the needs of a variety of readers.

The goal of the course was to prepare the students for writing tasks they will face on the job. Their evaluations, elicited in Writing Assignment #8, encourage me to continue to provide students with an alternative to technical writing, business communication, and writing about literature.